

## TWO GUYS MEET IN A HARDWARE STORE...

You might say the rest is historic preservation. That's what many say. There are signs of their work everywhere. Handcrafted trim replicated to match the original trim on a restored classic, a spire towering over the Kadesh Church or the many homes brought back to life throughout Edenton boasts the work of Dawson Tyler, the original force of Down East Preservation.

Charlotte was Tyler's boyhood home and it was at Washington and Lee University where his U.S. History and Preservation Major proved to be the foundation, a stepping stone if you will, to his current career as a local hands-on preservationist.

Before his advocacy for preservation became his vocation, he spent 15 years in the software field at Tyler Technologies - no relation - in Texas. As a hobby at the time he restored old homes.

"After my father died I wanted to get back to North Carolina to be near family and Edenton is where I wanted to be," shared Dawson. "I love the history and natural beauty of the area and I am an avid sportsman".

Eventually Dawson made the move to Edenton and once here recalled what turned out to be the best lesson learned by a professor offering this career tip. "If you ever find yourself in Edenton and you find your life allowing you to live out this passion of yours of preserving historic buildings, look this guy Doug King up."

Dawson had a problem, he wanted to begin a company but had no employees so he decided to follow the professor's words of advice.

Dawson realized King worked at Kellogg Hardware. "You're gonna think I'm crazy, my name is Dawson and many years ago my college preservation professor gave me your name and phone number," Dawson said upon meeting King at Kellogg. "I'm starting a company, I have no employees and I want you to be my first employee."

Two guys walk out of hardware store... and form a bond, restore eight homes together and continue to this day to strengthen the bond. King is the superintendent, essentially, managing all the DEP field teams and organically mentoring employees.

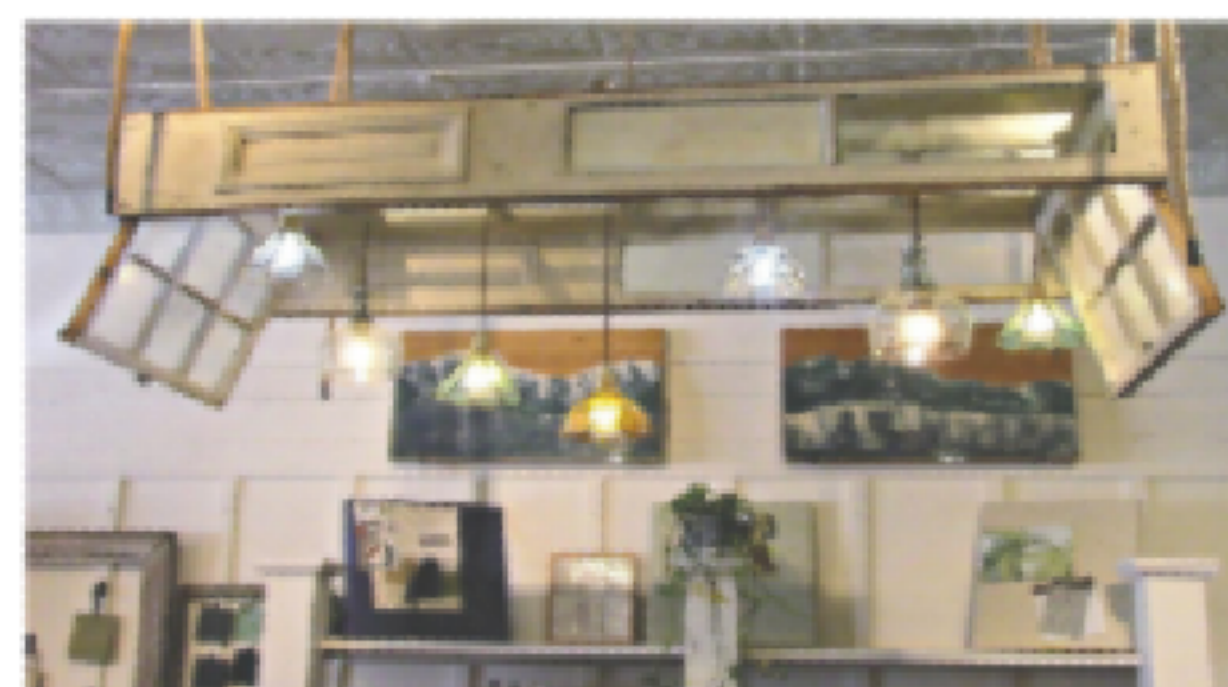
"When I started Down East Preservation (DEP) I never thought it would become what it has become," expressed Dawson. "We love our town and we love that we can help tell its story and that is what we see our role as. DEP helps tell the story of eastern NC through the preservation of its built history."

While Dawson enjoys the 'reveal' of a completed project, it's the creativity his work offers that he enjoys the most.

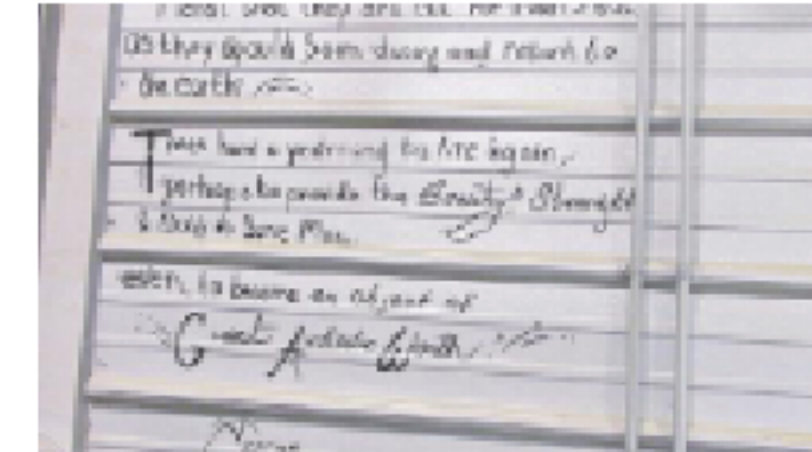
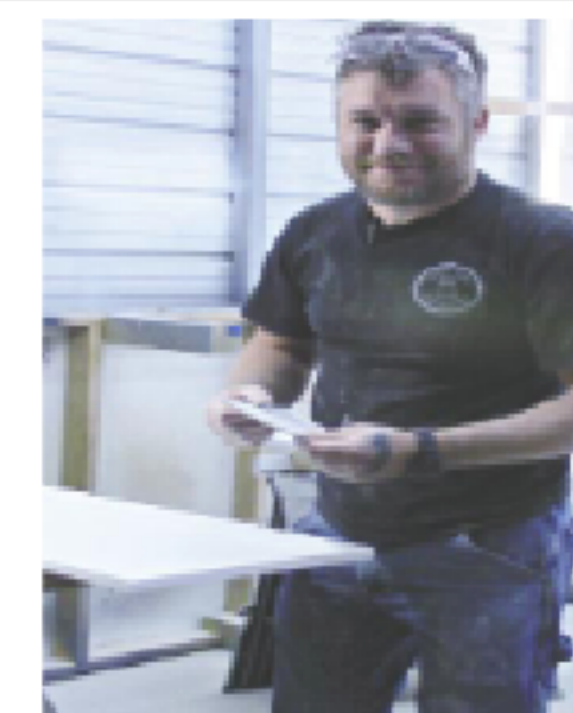
"Most clients hire us because we approach projects differently than most artisans. We look to preserve the past but we look to do it in a creative way," said Dawson. "Take the Herringbone project for instance. We worked with the owners to create a place that dashes the line between historic story telling of an extinct industry and the creation of a hip industrial space that would relate to anyone".



**Down East Preservation's New Offices & Retail. 307 South Broad Street, Edenton**



**Currently DEP is working on a few projects offering new opportunities for graduating seniors.**



## PRESERVING THE PAST FOR THE FUTURE

In 2019 Dawson Tyler left the digs he had been working out of for the previous four years behind. His company had outgrown a garage and a few storage containers so he decided to purchase three neglected buildings at the intersection of Oakum and Church St. in Edenton.

It was a monumental move for the entrepreneur who earlier had made a career move, pivoting from software development to hardwood restoration. The three buildings provided the space the growing company needed at the time to create a mini-campus housing a wood shop, a design center and offices for the staff. For the past years, many driving by noticed Dawson and his team meeting at their large conference table charting out the day.

The trio of buildings originally served the cotton mill community when first established. Cotton mill workers were paid with tokens only accepted as currency at the cotton mill stores.

Although Dawson's entrepreneurial vision viewed historic horizons beyond the intersection of new meets old, some town folk couldn't believe what Dawson saw.

"I can't believe you bought all three of those buildings, you know. Two years from now, like, you're still going to have vacant space in this building. What are you thinking?", asked Colony Tire Owner, Charlie Creighton, a visionary in his own right. "Let's see in two years, where I am, and we'll talk about it then," replied Dawson.

Soon after moving in Dawson's brand continued to grow as more front lawns sprouted Down East Preservation signs prompting a need for more space.

Other Down East signs were becoming more apparent as historic homes took on a renewed life boasting a renovated historic past performed by craftsmen the company was attracting and other apprentices they were training.

Dawson's passion for wood led the company to build a new wood shop on N. Broad St. noticeable by the weathered, worn antique wooden skiff gracing the entrance to the facility. The building is home to Woodworks Manager Lucas Belton. Lucas joined the Down East

Preservation team in 2022, bringing his specialized skills in working with reclaimed wood and constructing live edged furniture pieces. Today he manages the day-to-day operations of the new woodshop and team. His focus is placed on custom builds and epoxy work, along with sourcing reclaimed and local materials.

Since Edenton is such a small area and there's not a lot of available contractor, Dawson's business philosophy focuses on hiring people, some already craftsmen, others, ready to learn to become one of Down East's talented team members.

Down East is committed to preserving his-



tory while building and enhancing the community. A continual challenges for eastern North Carolina is the noticeable decrease in population. Dawson explained one of his goals is to continue to create opportunities for young people searching for a career in the area.

"Someone answers an ad for a material runner, meaning, we have a big dump truck that takes materials to all of our job sites all day, but then they end up stopping in the wood shop and seeing what they're doing, and they'll say hey, can I try some stuff in the wood shop? Next thing you know, you've got an apprentice. And next thing you know, he's out on a field team. So you're building, building from within," Dawson said.

"Especially when you're renovating old structures and homes, being able to control that piece of it. If you're working essentially with a home that is 300 years old, it's not going to be square, right. You know, we have a team lead on each team that is es-

entially the master craftsman and trains his own team on various specified skills."

Both Dawson and Lucas agree many graduating high school students are following a historic preservation career path. Currently DEP is working on a few projects offering new opportunities for graduating seniors.

"We don't have enough skill set tradesmen around here so we have to teach another generation. People understand becoming skilled as a high end carpenter is a great way to make a living. College is not for everyone and if you have an opportunity to stay in Edenton or go just about anywhere you want with those skills."

Each of Down East's teams are managed by master craftsmen who also train their team members, teaching them techniques important to their craft.

"This integrated process allows DEP to create 'field teams'. The teams are essentially managed by the master craftsman which train their team member. Individuals begin to acquire new and stronger skills, which allows them to build their career with us and gives them the flexibility needed to continue to grow," said Dawson.

Recently, DEP made another bold move, leaving the mini campus at Oakum and Church St. behind as they moved west to S. Broad St. to facilitate the need to be 'under one roof' - except for the wood shop which will remain on N. Broad St. and launch their newest DEP project, retail sales and a design department.

"We had a man who had a pecan tree fall down on his farm, lightning struck it. He came in and talked to Lucas at the Wood Shop and said, I want to make a side table", explained Marketing Manager and Lead Designer, Briley Rascoe. "This is how unique DEP can be. The man designed it for one of his children, who was partial to the pecan tree, as a birthday gift."

The new S. Broad St. location now serves as one of Edenton's newest retail experiences combining the old with the new. It's become a must see destination store for Edenton residents and visitors alike.